

25 JUNE 1976

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 2025 UNDER EXECUTIVE ORDER 14176

MEMOIRS OF A CIA PSYCHOLOGIST

With the help of handwriting analysis, a test called the Psychological Assessment System and 30,000 personality files, Jim Keehner spent seven years screening CIA agents and recruits. He's now on the agency's "useless person" list

By Maureen Orth

The young CIA case officers looked intently at their instructor. He was holding up a lemon. "I want you to take this lemon," he said, "and never let it leave you for the next three or four days. Smell it, touch it. Tell me your feelings about it. Get to know your lemon like you've never known another lemon in your life. This is an order."

The instructor was teaching "Personality Theory." He was a CIA psychologist, an expert called upon to train fresh clandestine operators in some of the secret arts of intelligence work. The lemon exercise was supposed to measure and improve their sensitivity, and the trainees were required to turn in written "contact" reports several days later. It was the usual mix. Some had developed meaningful relationships with their fruits. They rhapsodized for three pages about their lemons and had no trouble picking them out from a bowl of dozens. One nonconformist, however, merely drew a big picture of his lemon and labeled it with a question mark. Still, the instructor, Jim Keehner, was pleased. "I was trying to get them in contact with their feelings," he explained. "Feelings had been left out of their previous training, which is all cognitive."

In 1968 the CIA hired Jim Keehner as a specialist in the agency's ongoing effort to increase the psychological skills and awareness of its employees. A CIA case officer's prime duty is to recruit "agents" among foreign citizens around the world, and the agency has a vital interest in any method—no matter how far out—that promises to reveal weaknesses, vulnerabilities and psychic pressure points in possible recruits.

The CIA, in fact, has become one of the world's foremost laboratories for unusual psychological techniques. Keehner's office in the agency's Technical Service Division had a mandate to test anything—from hallucinogenic drugs to computerized handwriting analysis—that would help case officers manipulate their agents or other unsuspecting potential agents. Keehner's mission was to teach other CIA officers how to bring agents under control. Ironically, the negative nature of his work loosened his own self-control and brought him to the point of a complete breakdown. Still bearing the marks of his shattering experience, Keehner hesitantly agreed to provide a portrait of the agency's psychological operations.

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CIA 1.04 Keehner, J.
CIA 2.01 TSD
(Technical Service
Division)
CIA 4.01 Psychology
Assessment Syst.
CIA 1.04 Gittinger
John
Sirhan Sirhan
Oswald, Lee
HARVEY
Busch, Lloyd
CIA 1.04 Henderson
Ann
CIA 1.01 Cooby
Coigunder
Orth